

Mastery of surgery, 3rd edition

Lloyd M. Nyhus, Robert J. Baker, and Josef E. Fischer;
Boston; 1997; Little, Brown, and Company; 2139
pages.

The third edition of *Mastery of surgery*, which just became available, offers a comprehensive review of the craft of general surgery. This edition, with more than 2000 pages, is presented in two relatively large volumes. Pages are set in three columns which makes this rather wide book easier. Illustrations, which are abundant and well placed, for the most part follow a schematic black and white drawing style that makes them easy to interpret at a glance. Thus the figures contribute substantially to the understanding of concepts described in the text. The book has more than 200 chapters, each covering a technique, an operation, an approach to a disease, or another aspect of surgery in a rather well-organized fashion. The average chapter is short, i.e., about 10 pages, highly focused, clear, crisp, and to the point—in other words, eminently practical. Occasionally, two chapters overlap, providing differing points of view on a given argument. In some instances, there is an insightful comment at the end of a chapter expressing the opinion of one of the editors regarding a controversial aspect discussed in the chapter. The editors enlisted well over 300 contributors, many of them world-renowned for their expertise in the chosen area. With these many short and focused chapters, the busy practitioner is likely to find one that addresses the problem at hand with a simple search through the well-organized table of contents.

As enthusiastic as I am about the book, I do have some criticisms which emanate from, and in a way relate to, its very strengths. For example, I was surprised to see no mention of melanoma, sarcoma, and other common malignant tumors in a book that incorporates such a broad array of topics of practical importance. For reasons that are not clear, it is almost as though the editors deliberately left out the topic of surgical oncology. Second, although it is apparent that the editors went a long way to provide clear drawings, several chapters have old-looking, dark illustrations that are almost impossible to understand and that provide a startling contrast to the other drawings.

One final criticism is that perhaps in the interest of keeping the chapters focused and practical, some lean a bit too much toward indications and techniques, when I would prefer to see more depth and breadth. What I find especially useful in a surgery text is a presentation not only of the technique for a particular procedure, but even more important, the rationale for choosing that technique—based on the physiologic symptoms—and the expected results of surgery on those symptoms. In this excellent text I find the specifics of a given procedure, but only occasionally do I find a discussion providing a context for that procedure, such that I could make an informed decision to perform that procedure in preference to some other or perhaps even decline to operate at all. This kind of information helps in the challenging judgement calls a surgeon must make every day.

The above notwithstanding, I believe this encyclopedic book is ideal for the surgeon practicing in a small community where there may be a lack of specialists or referral centers or for residents who need to refine their understanding of details for an operation the next day. Even those with a highly focused practice will find the book a useful reference for quickly reviewing areas outside their expertise.

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Trials and tribulations of vascular surgery

R. M. Greenhalgh and F. G. R. Fowkes; London;
1996; W. B. Saunders; 434 pages.

Without the subtitle "Evidence-based Vascular Surgery" the title of the book might be somewhat unfathomable for readers from non-English speaking countries. However, this yearly anthology being the nineteenth in a row of traditionally high-quality productions in the field of vascular surgery, one more or less expects this book to carry the same high scientific level. And indeed it does. In fact, the scientific content of the manuscripts of the papers presented at the 1996 Charing Cross Symposium—if that content really could be weighed and judged—is in all likelihood of a higher-than-usual level.

This is probably directly related to the policy of the editors, who asked the authors "to examine the *evidence of effectiveness* of current management of some common vascular problems." Therefore, the chapter should inform us on "what is known from well-conducted randomized trials" and give insight in the weaker sides of controlled nonrandomized trials. The majority of authors have adhered to this assignment, but some have preferred to present their own material and data.

This has resulted in a mixture of some well-balanced critical reviews of current literature and some new data that do not always contribute to a clearer view of the present situation. What becomes clearly evident from many chapters is the lack of reliable, unequivocal data, frequently caused by a lack of uniform definitions and standards for reporting.

That is the bad news. The good news is that the "world of vascular surgery" recognized this problem at least a decade ago, and this has resulted in a number of well-designed and well-conducted prospective and randomized multicenter trials, allowing clear interpretation of trial data and giving useful answers to many hitherto unanswered questions. This is reflected in the titles of the chapters, which are almost all in a questioning mode like "Is there evidence in favour of vein graft surveillance?" and "Is the Miller cuff of benefit with PTFE for the femoropopliteal and femorodistal bypass?" The answers to these questions cannot always be given in a straightforward fashion, but the authors have tried to provide the reader with the existing evidence or our current knowledge of the subject. This has

led to a very informative accumulation of easily readable material, for the greater part in short chapters that are to the point and void of unnecessary frills.

Consequently, the book can be used by vascular surgeons as a readily available source to tune-up their knowledge and opinion on a variety of subjects. The contents are conveniently arranged according to the following subjects: carotid studies, aneurysms, intermittent claudication, critical ischemia, and venous studies. Both surgical residents and vascular fellows will find that this book also exposes the fragility of the layer of evidence that exists for what we so conveniently like to call "good clinical practice." This aspect of the book relates to the *tribulations* in vascular surgery, the gaps in our knowledge, and perception of what seems so logical but in fact is debatable. Several authors have tried to point out the directions for our future research and treatment policies, based on our current knowledge and a clear evaluation of "where we are now."

In the area of vascular and endovascular surgery, where our knowledge and insights are changing so rapidly and

where new data from new trials and new treatments become available every day, the assignment of the authors was not an easy task. My judgement is that they did well and that the editors managed to turn their contributions into a well-balanced book, that—by the way—could be used as an excellent source of surgical references for our colleagues in interventional radiology: it shows what we know and what we *don't know*.

There are simply too many different papers (28) to give specific comments on some of them in particular, but I cannot refrain from mentioning the (in my opinion) brilliant paper by Jesse E. Thompson and R. C. Allen on measuring the degree of carotid stenosis. After unravelling the "chaos in methodology" they conclude with the answer: "Yes, it does matter how carotid stenosis is measured." I urge you to read the book and find out why.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

The receipt of the books listed below is acknowledged. This listing is regarded as appropriate return for the courtesy of the sender. The books that are of particular interest will be reviewed and the review published as space permits.

Nitric oxide: Principles and actions

Jack Lancaster, Jr.; San Diego; 1996; Academic Press; 355 pages; \$79.95.

Smooth muscle excitation

T. B. Bolton, T. Tomita; San Diego; 1996; Academic Press; 527 pages; \$120.

Endovascular surgery for aortic aneurysms

Brian Hopkinson, Waquar Yusuf, Simon Whitaker, Frank Veith; Philadelphia; 1997; W. B. Saunders; 321 pages; \$89.

Cytokine yearbook, vol. 1

Pestka, Schellekens, von Wussow; Dordrecht, the Netherlands; 1996; Kluwer; 249 pages; \$91.

Handbook of stroke

David Wiebers, Valery Feigin, Robert Brown; Philadelphia; 1997; Lippincott-Raven; 450 pages; \$45.

Peripheral vascular interventions 1996: A bibliographic reference (CD-ROM)

Gerald Dorros; Armonk, N.Y.; 1996; Futura; \$95.

Current therapy in critical care medicine

Joseph Parrillo; St. Louis; 1997; Mosby-Year Book; 430 pages; \$84.95.